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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: LUKASHENKO ADMITS RIGGING ELECTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) President Lukashenko admitted during a press conference with Ukrainian journalists in Minsk that he rigged the March 2006 presidential election. Lukashenko claimed that the GOB deliberately understated the official vote tally to satisfy European Q 9QI9M9. The dictator also criticized Russia for threatening the future of the proposed Russian-Belarusian Union State by raising gas prices for Belarus and the Belarusian opposition for allegedly reveling in those price hikes. End Summary.

Lukashenko Votes Underreported to Gain EU Recognition

¶2. (U) On November 23, during a press conference with Ukrainian journalists in Minsk, President Lukashenko said that the GOB falsified the March 19, 2006 presidential election results, allegedly in favor of the opposition. Asserting that he had actually won as much as 93.5 percent of the vote, Lukashenko claimed that the regime deliberately underreported his tally by seven points because EU members had pledged to recognize such election results. Lukashenko lamented that his efforts to make the election results "more European" had failed. The following day, Central Election Commission Secretary Nikolay Lozovik publicly denied any election rigging and insisted that authorities had conducted the election in strict adherence to Belarusian law.

Lukashenko Belittles the Opposition

¶3. (U) Following his claims of understated popularity, Lukashenko attempted to present himself as open-minded and tolerant toward his opponents by acknowledging that his government should hear alternative points of view lest GOB policymakers be "overrun with mud." Nevertheless, he demeaned what he termed the "so-called opposition" for "running away" from supporting Lukashenko when he was a member of the opposition. Moreover, he excoriated opposition leaders, whom he refused to name on the grounds that they were not worthy of being named, for allegedly lobbying the West for sanctions against Belarus and rejoicing in the rise of gas prices for Belarus.

Rising Gas Prices Threaten Belarusian-Russian Union State

14. (U) In response to a reporter's question about gas prices, Lukashenko criticized the Putin government for reneging on energy agreements signed by former President Yeltsin and thereby endangering Belarusian-Russian economic integration leading to the creation of a Union State. Lukashenko claimed that the price of gas itself was not at issue but that Belarus was arguing on a broader principle of equal energy prices. Implying that Russian gas subsidies had been a form of compensation to Belarus for overpaying Russia for petroleum, he claimed that Belarus currently pays USD 40 per ton more for Russian oil than does Ukraine.

Union of Belarus and Ukraine?

15. (U) Noting that Russia charges Ukraine more than USD 140 above cost for oil and calling Ukraine the "jugular of Russia and Europe," Lukashenko called upon Belarus and Ukraine to coordinate their energy policies so as to strengthen their economic negotiating positions with Russia. Tracing Belarus and Ukraine's common history to the medieval Kyivan Rus and highlighting their common interests areas besides energy, Lukashenko expressed hope that a Belarusian-Ukrainian Union State would be created in the future and that such a union would enhance both countries' influence throughout the world.

Lukashenko insisted that Ukraine's desiderata to join NATO and the EU would not adversely affect future Belarusian-Ukrainian political-economic integration and predicted that Belarus would likely join the WTO sometime after Russia and Ukraine.

Comment

16. (C) Lukashenko is renowned for making off the wall and provocative statements, but the admission that his regime tampered with the March 19 presidential election results is surprising even by his "standards." His calls for closer coordination with Ukraine are part of his broader strategy to compensate for inevitable increases in Russian energy prices.
Stewart